

leadership styles— a key to effectiveness

C. N. Lester

Each person's leadership style has an important bearing on how effectively an organization reaches its objectives. This is especially true within Extension, where individuals have major responsibilities and are in decision-making roles.

Most Extension professionals are neither fully aware of their particular leadership style nor know how they might develop their leadership patterns to become more effective leaders. This article examines the major leadership styles and presents a leadership-personality theory that suggests that every member of Extension can become a more effective leader.

Styles Change

The concept of leadership has changed as new information is discovered, accepted, and used. There are many reasons for this, but an important one is the improved methods in social science research that have recently emerged.

Ross and Hendry write that "it was inevitable that the earliest studies of leadership should concentrate on the leader as a person."¹ Why? Because leadership was for centuries in the nature of an inheritance—leaders were born, not made. Leadership was a monopoly held by the aristocracy.

Beal, Bohlen, and Raudabaugh say that "just as our concept of democracy is a growing and expanding one, so is there a parallel growth and development of the meaning of leadership. The expansion of the democratic principle has demanded that new types of leadership arise."²

McGregor argues that we know very little about leadership. He says we haven't yet learned how to use available talent—how to create an organizational climate encouraging human growth.³

Thus, as the search to improve the organizational climate continues, our present concept of leadership will be modified and clarified. For instance, authority and management are words often used interchangeably for the word leadership.

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This semantic practice makes it difficult to study leadership. Also, researchers still have conflicting ideas or theories about the subject. No doubt, this will continue producing different conclusions about major variables influencing leadership styles and their development. These problems simply reinforce the need for a workable perspective of the term leadership and the need to try to define it.

What Is Leadership?

Leadership is an important resource of all organizations and is exhibited by individuals through a broad scope of talents and abilities.

Students of the subject have different views on how this resource is used within organizations. Tead says that leadership is an act that influences.⁴ Shartle says leadership is an act that influences others in a shared direction.⁵ Haiman asserts that “in the broadest sense, leadership refers to that process whereby an individual directs, guides, influences, or controls the thoughts, feelings, or behavior of other human beings.”⁶

Leadership as seen by Pigon is a process of mutual stimulation by any person who during the time, and, insofar as his will, feeling, and insight directs, controls others in the pursuit of a specific cause.⁷

This approaches the concept of group leadership presented by Cartwright and Zander, who perceive leadership as being shared. They view group leadership as the performance of acts that help the group achieve its preferred outcome.⁸ These acts may be specific, such as moving the group toward its goals, improving the quality of interactions among group members, building group cohesiveness, or making resources available to the group.

From this, you can see that leadership is the resource that an individual or a group uses to enable an organization to do what it needs, should, and wants to do.

To become a more effective leader, each person must analyze his own leadership style and determine the scope of his leadership zone.

Leadership Styles

Different leadership styles accomplish the task and maintenance functions of an organization.

Mott speaks of three major leadership styles—the democratic, the multifactor, and the situational.⁹ The democratic style promotes open communication with effective members taking part in the decision-making process.

The multifactor style takes into account certain “factors,” with “task” and “expressive” factors considered the main factors. The “task” factor includes activities that implement work objectives and set standards, objectives, and goals. The “expressive” factor considers activities designed to integrate the group socio-emotionally. The multifactor style considers

many conditioning variables, such as position in the hierarchy, degree of professionalism, personality patterns present within work groups, and nature of work performed.

The situational style also gives attention to a different set of conditioning variables as they influence the action of leaders. Included among these situational variables are the positional power of the leader, the degree of group tasks, and the satisfying character of leader-member relations.

Jenning analyzes four leadership styles—the autocrat, bureaucrat, democrat, and neurocrat.¹⁰ Other writers identify similar leadership styles. The result is a continuum of styles ranging from the very authoritative to the very free, which divides readily into three general style classifications.

Continuum of Styles

We may start with the *autocratic* approach to leadership. An individual using this style determines all policies, activities, and goals of the organization. Leaders with this style take no part in the work except when conducting meetings, telling others what to do, or, when demonstrating, how to do what needs doing. Members of an organization led by an autocrat are uncertain about what to do and usually take only actions they're told to take. An autocratic leader is "personal" in both praise and criticism of the work performed by each organization member.

Next consider the *democratic* leadership style. This produces a shared leadership that promotes a feeling of satisfaction and achievement as the group makes progress on tasks. The leader helps the organization's members understand the steps required in working toward the organization's goals. Members respond to this style by taking greater responsibility for group maintenance and task performance. Members also show more interest in their work because they feel that they have a "stake" in it.

Then, there's the *free-rein* leadership style. In this approach, the leader gives minimum guidance. Leaders using this style remain in the background and seldom express an opinion or work with organization members. Members have almost complete freedom, operate with a minimum of rules, and often serve as leaders in making decisions that guide the organization.

With the broad array of talent available among members of organizations today, the democratic leadership style seems to offer the most promise for achieving maximum results. Certainly, there are exceptions. Situations may require different leadership styles, and in a given organization the leader may apply all three styles as he faces different problems and situations. Fielder indicates that the situation has a significant bearing on the type of leadership pattern basic to effective group performance.¹¹

Key to Success

An important key to successful leadership is to know how, when, and how much of what leadership style is needed in a particular situation. The choice is a judgment on the part of the individual performing the leadership role. Actually, most leaders have a dominant style of leadership and developing the ability to use different styles isn't an easy task.

As an organization matures and gains experience, the role of the leader changes. Figure 1 illustrates this point. In the developmental stage, the leader must carry the primary responsibility for the organization. But as the organization grows and matures, the leader can delegate responsibility. The same analysis can be applied to any group or committee. However, as the future shows, the leader must always maintain a certain level of responsibility.

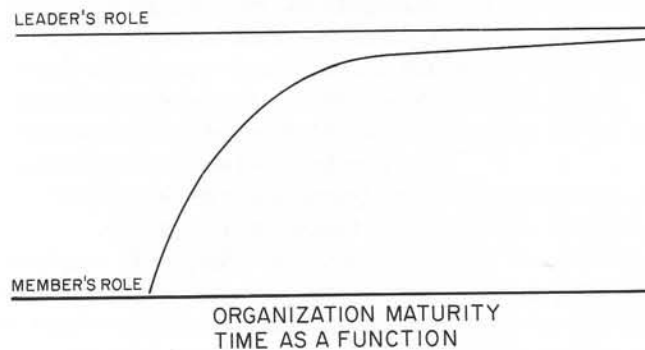


Figure 1. Organization maturity time as a function.

To compensate for the changes in an organization's growth, the leadership style must change. Leaders faced with this situation often have some major questions. How does an autocratic leader adjust as the organization develops? Should an organization have an autocratic leader to a certain stage in its development and then have a democratic leader or vice versa? How does a leader cope with ever-changing conditions? These are perplexing questions. So, let's see how leaders might effectively adjust to meet changing conditions.

Developing Leadership

Personality

Psychologists generally agree that every aspect of our behavior from the way we walk to the side we choose on current issues displays our personality. They also suggest that much of our personality is set when we're very young, most of it taking place between three and five years of age.¹² Kidd indicates that by age 12 or 15 each individual's personality—his most "natural" style—has been determined.¹³ Most writers, however, agree that an individual's personality does change over time and may change entirely with a traumatic experience.

Havighurst analyzes “developmental tasks”—ones that arise within a specific period in each person’s life.¹⁴ If a developmental task is successfully performed, this leads to the person’s satisfaction and to an increased probability of success with later tasks. Failure leads to the person’s dissatisfaction, disapproval by the society, and an increased probability of difficulty with later tasks. Havighurst’s six stages or levels of developmental tasks include childhood, middle childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, middle age, and later maturity.

Erikson, explaining how a person matures psychologically, develops a theory using eight stages of man.¹⁵ First, there’s the stage *trust vs. basic mistrust*, occurring from infancy to about 12 months of age. During this stage, the child first shows trust and the first social achievements take place. An enduring pattern is established for resolving conflict involving trust vs. mistrust. The degree to which trust develops depends on the quality of maternal relationship. Erikson says drive and hope are also established during this first stage.

Man’s second stage is *autonomy vs. shame and doubt*. This stage becomes decisive for the ratio of love and hate, cooperation and willfulness, freedom of self-expression and its suppression. Significant in this stage is the successful development of a sense of self-control without loss of self-esteem which comes with a lasting sense of good will and pride. If this sense is inadequately developed, a lasting propensity for doubt exists. Self-control and will power also emerge during the second stage.

The other stages—middle childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, middle age, and later maturity—also provide significant insight to understanding the psychological and personality growth of a person.

Environment

Research performed by Baker and Lewin shows how a person’s early environment affects his behavior later.¹⁶ They found that parents may subconsciously place demands for desired conduct on their children. These demands may not come from paternal consideration and thoughtfulness toward the child and what’s best for his growth. Instead they may come from the parents’ tension and anxiety to prove themselves.

For example, a child may discover that punishment is the immediate consequence of idleness or misbehavior and may find it difficult to get love and approval. He learns to avoid disapproval through obedience, concerted effort, and high achievement. As a result, the child may become overly pre-occupied with a concern to keep busy, avoid wasting time, and master his conduct. The child’s anxiety about his acceptability to his parents may be relieved this way. This method of reducing or avoiding guilt becomes a powerful motivating

force that may persist. Thus, what an adult does may not be his own, but what he has taken from his parents.

The work of Baker and his colleagues is supported by Riesman, who says:

Parents who discipline and provoke guilt-ridden anxieties in children serve effectively to set a gyroscope in motion in a child's early life. The child, as an adult, continues to take his orientation toward life from the gyroscope which has been set many years before.¹⁷

Toward a Leadership Theory

If you accept these personality concepts, we can postulate that setting our personality early provides an anchor for our leadership attitudes and practices in adult life. Therefore, a person's most dominant leadership style is greatly determined by the values and beliefs he holds about the "best" way to treat people. These result from deep-rooted personality characteristics that make a person choose one approach to leadership over another.

A person's capacity for leadership may change as a function of time and experience. Figure 2 shows a person with a democratic leadership style. It displays how an individual whose capacity for leadership is set very early in life may undergo a gradual change as he physically and psychologically matures and the capacity for leadership is developed and changed by successive experiences. Zone A represents the individual's "natural" personality zone. Zone B represents the individual's expanded leadership zone capacity.

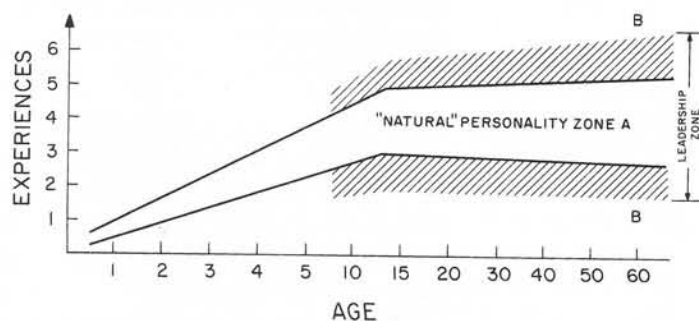


Figure 2. Leadership zone for democratic leader.

If a person's early environment helps develop a broad personality zone, he's apt to have a broad capacity for leadership throughout life. Zone A would expand as the individual matures and successfully does appropriate developmental tasks. Also, successfully completing an education and training in behavioral skills helps expand a person's leadership capacity.

One whose early life set a narrow capacity for leadership will tend to perform as an autocratic leader. This is illustrated in Figure 3. So, with this leadership personality style he may try to broaden his leadership capacity by developing a personality that moves into Zone B. The individual whose environment has set a broad capacity for leadership may perform effectively in a free-rein situation where the autocratic leader couldn't. If we follow this proposition, a combination between these two extremes would tend to produce a democratic leadership style. Thus, the breadth span of an individual's leadership zone is important to his performance in various leadership roles.

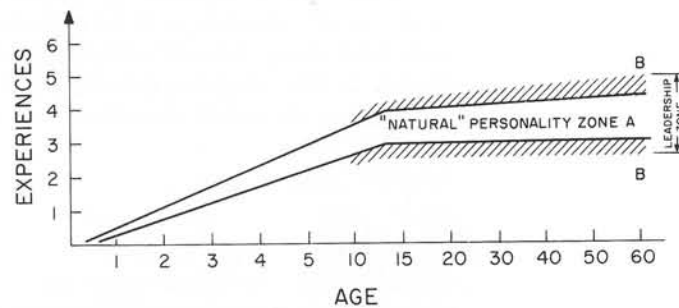


Figure 3. Leadership zone for autocratic leader.

Leadership- Personality Theory in Practice

The leadership theory suggests that the individual is in a sense inner-directed and can't freely analyze a given situation. Moreover, each individual uses the leadership style previously designed into his personality. It's necessary, therefore, that each person deliberately analyze his leadership style and capacity. It further suggests that a specific leader has little flexibility in changing leadership styles when confronted by different situations demanding attention in rapid sequence. This is self-evident if you accept the main theme that every person has a designed-in or natural style he relies on and displays in decision-making situations.

To become a more effective leader, each person must analyze his own leadership style and determine the scope of his leadership zone. Then, he must want to improve his effectiveness as a leader by overcoming or compensating for his weak areas. This will require dedicated effort, including instruction and experience.

In addition to an individual's normal training and experience, the leadership zone required for an organization can be expanded through a competent staff with leadership skills that complement those of the leader. For example, if the leader of an organization has an autocratic leadership

style and the organization requires a democratic leadership, the immediate staff may need to exert a democratic leadership style.

Consultants are a second source of expansion of the leadership zone, especially for leaders higher in the organization. Outside assistance can help identify problem areas and suggest appropriate responses. This help can give the leader facts in an unthreatening way he can use to expand his leadership zone.

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Conclusion

The theory sketched in this article is pertinent to all segments of Extension. For example, a unit or county chairman may have an autocratic leadership style. If the other staff members can recognize this "natural" style, they can do much to enhance the effectiveness of the leader. By discussing with his peers the decision-making problems associated with his role, the leader's actions can become more compatible with the needs of other organization members, as well as the organization itself. Even if a leader fails to recognize his leadership style, the staff can do much to improve the leader's effectiveness and that of the organization by recognizing the leadership style and complementing the areas of weakness.

A second example applies to community leaders. Understanding the leadership styles of various community leaders by the Extension staff can help the leaders be more productive in implementing the Extension program. In another case, a community organization may exhibit a definite leadership style because of the nature of their cause. Being aware of this style helps the agent work more effectively with the organization.

Leaders who fail to recognize their leadership style or ignore other factors affecting their capacity as leaders won't expand their "natural" leadership-personality zone. They'll operate only within the "natural" leadership zone they established in their formative years. The result may quickly fix their position within the organization.

The leadership-personality theory helps every individual of the organization develop into a more effective leader if he wants to.

It also can contribute to the organization's growth as well as help each individual prepare himself to assume positions requiring a greater capacity for leadership. This allows the individual's goals to mesh with the organization's. It also permits the leader to draw on the resources of others so the resources are used to maintain and strengthen the organization's capacity and all the people involved.

Footnotes

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8. Dorwin Cartwright and Alvin Zander, *Group Dynamics* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1960), p. 492.
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